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ADL MISSION CROSSES MIDDLE EAST, VISITING PERES, MUBARAK, ARAFAT AND SAUDI LEADERS

An eight-day mission to the Middle East in late November took 10 national ADL leaders to meetings with government officials in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt and Gaza. The visit to Saudi Arabia came at the invitation of King Fahd and similar invitations were issued by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasir Arafat.

The delegation discussed many issues, including the Arab-Israel peace process, the Israel-Syria track, the threat of terrorism and the growth of religious extremism.

The highlight of the visits, said David H. Strassler, ADL National Chairman, "was the opportunity to open previously closed channels of communication and to break down barriers that had divided the Jewish and Arab communities."

IN SAUDI ARABIA, the ADL leaders met with Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal in a conference room at the Foreign Ministry where the visitors noted a *National Geographic* map hanging on the wall clearly indicating the State of Israel . . . progress from the days when Arab maps either blanked out the area or referred to it as "Palestine."

Prince Saud said that while neither Saudi Arabia nor American Jews have a direct role in the peace process, both have a duty to urge the sides



ADL National Director Abraham H. Foxman with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal.

to move towards peace.

"Peace must be developed gradually, it cannot be built on mirages," he said.

The ADL visitors told Prince Saud of the Israelis' distress that there were no condolence messages about Mr. Rabin's death from Saudi Arabia and Syria. Noting that the Foreign Minister had told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations a couple of weeks

Continued on page 3

ADL MISSION CROSSES MIDDLE EAST...

Continued from page 1

earlier in New York that they should support Mr. Rabin and the peace process, the ADL leaders said this made the lack of condolences even more disconcerting.

The Prince said, "King Fahd felt a personal loss, even though he didn't know Mr. Rabin, because the world lost a fighter for peace. I feel the same way, and a lot of our people feel that way." When asked if the ADL mission could convey this message to Shimon Peres and Mrs. Rabin when they went to Israel, he responded, "Absolutely."

The ADL leaders later delivered the message, which received wide media coverage.

The Foreign Minister also told the ADL group:

- Saudi Arabia is prepared to support measures to end the primary Arab boycott by the Arab League. The country has taken the lead in the Gulf Cooperation Council to end the secondary and tertiary boycotts.
- Syria seemed more receptive to the peace process following the assassination.
- He opposed the Middle East Development bank supported by the U.S., Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians as unnecessary and wasteful.
- Saudi Arabia will not cooperate with Iraq as long as Saddam Hussein is in power. Iran remains a major threat to regional and international security. He supports the U.S. containment policy of Iran.

At a luncheon with Prince Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., the Prince told the visitors he feels the Rabin assassination will afford new opportunities for peace. He said he anticipates a major new drive in the peace process, urging patience but strongly hinting of significant movement on the Syrian front.

Usama Fagieh, the Minister of Commerce, who headed the Saudi delegation to the recent Amman conference on regional economic development, emphasized the need to isolate politics from the economic sphere.

The ADL mission also met with Ali Al-Naimi, Petroleum Minister, who expressed support for the peace process and implied the possibility of oil markets with Israel

once peace is established. Abdul Wahab Attar, Planning Minister, said he anticipates economic growth for the entire region if the peace process succeeds.

Sheik Abdulaziz Al-Tweijri, second in command of the National Guard, who hosted a dinner for the ADL mission, spoke highly of both Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres and noted that Israel did not come to the region as a colonial power but in search of a national home.

He observed the common experiences of Arabs and the many Israeli Jews who came from Arab lands. He also expressed admiration for the lasting power of the Jewish people in the face of persecution.

IN GAZA, at the meeting with Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader called for both sides to redouble efforts to ensure the success of the peace process.

When questioned about his continuing use of the term "jihad," Mr. Arafat explained that he uses it in a benign way to convince extremists that the true terminology does not have to mean war. At Abraham Foxman's suggestion, he agreed to use the formulation "jihad for peace."

He explained his recent speech at Harvard University which many interpreted as a backing away from the commitment to eliminate provisions in the Palestinian Covenant calling for Israel's destruction. Mr. Arafat said he meant that he could not guarantee in advance the result of a free vote in the Palestine National Council. With some prodding from ADL, he said he will urge the body to remove the objectionable provisions.

IN EGYPT, at an hour-long meeting with President Hosni Mubarak at the Presidential Palace, the Egyptian leader made the following points:

- Syrian-Israeli peace is only a matter of time. President Assad has no alternative but he will continue to take his time. The early warning ground station Israel wants is a problem, because of the populated areas in the Golan. Moreover, he pointed out, technology today permits effective monitoring in other ways which Israel should develop and offer in the negotia-



Melvin Salberg, ADL Honorary National Chairman, with Israel's Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

tions as part of a package.

- The Rabin assassination proved to the Arab world that Mr. Rabin had truly adopted the peace line. It also underscored the differences in Israeli society. He praised the late Prime Minister as a flexible and good partner with whom he worked well over the years. He spoke highly of Shimon Peres while expressing caution over his penchant for boldness in preference to his own gradualism.

- In response to a new ADL report on anti-Semitic cartoons in the Egyptian press, he said he could take no action because it would be futile and counterproductive. He condemned the cartoons and said ADL could quote him publicly. He also agreed to support an approach by the U.S. Ambassador to discuss the issue with the Egyptian press syndicate.

At Rabin Funeral

In the aftermath of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, **Abraham H. Foxman**, ADL National Director, traveled to Israel as part of President Clinton's official party. Other ADL leaders joining him in Israel were **David H. Strassler**, National Chairman; **Howard P. Berkowitz**, National Executive Committee Chairman; **Melvin Salberg**, Honorary Chairman of the National Commission; **Glen Tobias**, International Affairs Chairman, and **Harry Wall**, Director, ADL Israel Office.

The group paid their respects at the lying-in-state at the Knesset before attending the funeral services and the burial. Later, Mr. Foxman and Mr. Wall made a *shiva* call to Mrs. Rabin at her home.

Continued on page 4

ADL MISSION CROSSES MIDDLE EAST...



Harry Wall, ADL Israel Office Director, greets Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

• He recommended an international forum to deal with the terrorist/drug connection.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Amre Moussa seemed intent on overcoming his hard-edged image toward Israel. Saying that he trusts Shimon Peres to manage

the peace process, he offered Egypt's assistance.

He echoed the sentiments of others that

peace is inevitable, that it is just a matter of time. Progress must be built, he said, on a number of pillars: security, economic development and a final negotiation with withdrawal, normalization and open borders. He noted that the private sector is increasing business contacts with Israel including a number of joint ventures.

He called for greater international cooperation to combat terrorism and said that Egypt has met with British leaders to discuss activities of the Moslem Brotherhood, headquartered in London.

IN ISRAEL, the ADL leaders met with Prime Minister Shimon Peres, U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk, Minister Yossi Beilin, Moshe Shahal, Minister of Police, Amnon Shahak, Chief of Staff, Israel Defense Forces, and Likud MK Ariel Sharon.

The visit with the Prime Minister was his first with an American group since Mr. Rabin's death. Under discussion were issues of importance to Israel and the U.S., including methods of dealing with extrem-

ists and healing the divide between the religious and secular communities. They emphasized that it is time for the "silent majority" to speak out.

The mission expressed continued ADL support for the peace process. Mr. Peres told the visitors he would continue his predecessor's policies to move the process forward.

The group paid a visit to *Kikar Rabin*, the square in Tel Aviv where Mr. Rabin was assassinated, which has been renamed in his honor. □

Bumper Stickers Abound in Israel

Bumper stickers are always popular in Israel but since the Rabin funeral, two versions are making their appearance everywhere. One, *Shalom Chaver* (Peace Brother) was part of President Clinton's funeral eulogy. The other says in Hebrew, "Yitzhak Rabin, Forgive Us For We Were Silent."